

MORE THAN YOU EVER WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT KEYCARD BUT WERE TOO CHEAP TO BUY KANTAR'S BOOK TO FIND OUT

1. After agreement on a suit, 4N is Roman Key Card 14/30 (or 30/14 if you prefer). Key cards are the four Aces and the King of trump.
2. 4N is NEVER key card after a natural NT bid or in most sequences beginning with 1N or 2N.

The following are all quantitative slam invitations.

1N-2C-2D-4N. Responder has at least one 4 card Major. Opener does not.

1N-2C-2S-4N. Responder has 4 H. Opener has 4 S.

1N-2C-2H-4N. Responder has 4 S. Opener has 4 H but has not denied 4 S. In addition to choosing between 4N and 6N, Opener may choose 5S or 6 S if he has both majors.

1N-2D!-2H-4N Responder has exactly 5 H. Since Opener may have only 2, no 8 card fit is established.

Contrast that with:

1N-4D!-4H-4N. 4N is RKC since the Texas transfer bid promised 6 and the 1N bid promised 2.

1N-2D!-3H!-4N is again RKC since the 3H super-accept bid promised 4 card support.

1S-2D-2H-3C!-4N? This cannot possibly be Key card. You are in a game forcing auction but no suit has been established. The 3C bid probably did NOT show a real club suit (although Responder may have something there). Responder has promised a good 12 HCP or more with 5+ D but NOT 3 S OR 4 H. Opener has promised exactly 5 S and 4 H. With more of either he would have rebid it at the 3 level. The 3 club bid mainly serves to ask Opener to bid 3N with a club stop. Obviously Opener has extras, with no worse than the guarded C King and 4N is asking for a raise to 6N with more than a minimum game force.

1any suit-4N is STRAIGHT BLACKWOOD for aces only, NOT Keycard. If you want to use Keycard, set the trump suit first with a forcing auction (2/1 followed by a raise, Jacoby 2N, inverted minor raise, etc.), THEN bid 4N.

3. Determining which suit is the Keycard suit can be awkward. It is useful to have a set of priorities when not obvious. These are my agreements.
 - 3.1 The only suit that has been agreed. (OK this one IS obvious)
 - 3.2 If a double fit is established, the higher of the two suits.
 - 3.3 A suit that has been jump rebid
 - 3.4 A two club Opener's suit
 - 3.5 The last suit bid naturally

4. “Never (What NEVER?) Well, HARDLY ever” bid RKC with either a void or two top losers in an unbid suit. The exceptions are few and far between. I will leave you to discover them in the years to come. In the meantime, go with NEVER.

If you have a void, you cannot interpret the response unless it shows all missing keys. Is a missing key in your void suit? Then all is well. Does partner have the A in your void suit? Oh @\$&!! There is no way to tell the difference.

Similarly, if you have two top losers in a suit that your partner has neither bid nor cued, when you are missing one key, it is likely to be in that suit. You may also be missing the K of that suit, in which case your opponents will have a hard time controlling their glee when they cash the first two tricks.

5. Responses to 4N RKC 14/30:

5C shows 1 or 4 keys but says nothing about the trump Queen

5D shows 0 or 3 keys but says nothing about the trump Queen

5H shows 2 keys without the trump Queen

5S shows 2 keys with the trump Queen

CAUTION: Always check carefully with a new partner to see if they are playing 14/30 or 30/14. For 30/14 reverse the 5C and 5D responses.

6. Do NOT bid RKC unless you intend to bid a slam whenever you have at least 4 of the 5 keys.

There is one exception to the rule about intending to bid slam with just one key is missing.

If, after finding that one key is missing, you will have room for a Queen ask below 5 of the trump suit, it is permissible to ask for keys when you intend to bid 6 after finding the Queen, but only bid 5 when the Queen is missing.

7. While the 5H and 5S bids (showing 2 keys) immediately define the status of the Queen, 5C and 5D do not. After an RKC response showing 1/4 (5C) or 0/3 (5D), the next non-trump suit bid asks for the Queen.

Ex: 1S-2N!-3S!-4N-5D-5H = (S Queen?)

2N! is Jacoby 2N = GF forcing (usually) balanced raise with at least 4 S

3S shows a balanced hand with 17+ HCP

4N is keycard for S

5D shows 0 or 3 keycards

5H asks about the S Queen

Note: If H were trumps, you would have to bid 5S to ask about the S Queen.

8. Responses to the Queen ask:

A. Make the cheapest rebid in the trump suit without the Queen.

Ex: 1S-2N!-3S!-4N-5D-5H-5S = (no S Queen)

B. If you have the Queen but no non-trump King, jump in the trump suit.

Ex: 1S-2N!-3S!-4N-5D-5H-6S = (S Queen but no outside King)

C. If you have the Q and a non-trump K, bid your cheapest non-trump K.

Ex: 1S-2N!-3S!-4N-5D-5H-6D = (S Queen, D King, but no C King)

Note: After a response showing the trump Queen and a King, the bid of another non-trump suit is a K ask.

Ex: 1S-2N!-3S!-4N-5D-5H-6D (S Queen, D King, but no C King)-6H = (H King?) With the H King, you are required to bid 7S, without it just bid 6S.

D. If you can make a Queen ask below 5 of your trump suit, then it may be a small slam try only, planning to stay out of slam if you are missing one key and the trump Queen. If the ask is above 5 of your suit, it is a grand slam try and guarantees all 5 keys.

E. Make a positive response to the Queen ask if you have undisclosed length that adds up to 10 trumps. When you hold 10 trumps including the A and K, but missing the Queen, the trump suit will split 2-1 (or 3-0 but with the Queen finessable) often enough to give the contract good enough odds to bid.

Example: 1S-2N!-3C!-4N-5C-5D (Q?)- Since partner guaranteed 4 S for his Jacoby 2N bid, you must make a positive response whenever you have 6+ trumps, whether or not you have the Queen.

F. If you hear a response showing the Queen when you have it yourself, either your partner has extra trump length or he has made a mistake. Believe your partner and bid as if he has the extra length. If it turns out otherwise, be understanding the FIRST time.

G. You do not HAVE to ask for the Queen. If you have it yourself (or know that there is a 10 card fit) or have all the keys when only wanting to bid a small slam, you should not ask.

9. Asking for Kings.

After any response to 4N RKC 14/30, an immediate bid of 5N asks for specific non-trump K's. Asking for K's is a 100% GUARANTEE of holding all 5 keys plus the Queen (or equivalent length) and is a grand slam try. Do NOT ask for Kings unless you ARE interested in a Grand Slam.

NOTE: If responder has an undisclosed source of tricks (specifically a solid side suit which partner cannot be expected to know about) and can count 13 tricks given the guarantee of the keys and Queen, responder must jump to 7 of the suit (7N if responder can count 13 tricks without any ruffs).

Otherwise, respond with the cheapest non-trump King. Bypassing a King denies it. With no non-trump King, bid 6 of the trump suit.

1S-2N!-3S!-4N-5D-5N-6C I have the C King.

1S-2N!-3S!-4N-5D-5N-6D I have the D King but not the C King.

After a specific King response, the bid of another suit asks for that King.

1S-2N!-4N-5S-5N-5C-5D "I wanted the D King. If you have it bid 7S, otherwise 6S."

1H-2N-4N-5S-5N-5C-6H "I wanted the S King. The C King didn't float my boat and I could have asked for the D K but did not. Therefore, when you have eliminated everything else...."

WARNING: IF SHOWING ANY KING WOULD TAKE YOU PAST 6 OF YOUR TRUMP SUIT, YOU CANNOT ASK FOR SPECIFIC K'S UNLESS:

A. The only missing K above your trump suit is enough to bid 7.

OR

B. You are willing to play 6N if partner responds above 6 of your trump suit.

CAUTION: Always confirm with a new partner whether they are playing Specific King Responses (strongly preferred) or Number of King Responses (traditional).

The Number of King Responses are:

5C shows no non-trump Kings

5D shows 1 non-trump King

5H shows 2 non-trump Kings

5S shows 3 non-trump Kings

10. Void showing in response to 4N RKC 14/30

In response to 4N you can show a useful void.

- A. With 2 keys and a useful void bid 5N,
- B. With 1 or 3 keys and a useful void, bid 6 of the void suit if it is lower than the trump suit.
- C. With 1 or 3 key and a useful void, bid 6 of the trump suit if the void is higher than the trump suit.
- D. With 4 keys just show the keys, do not try to show the void.
- E. A USEFUL void suit is one which your partner has not bid.

After a void showing response, bidding the next non-trump suit below 6 of the trump suit is a Queen ask to try for a Grand Slam.

1S-2N!-4C! (showing a good second suit)-4N-6D (1 or 4 with a D void)-6H(S Queen?)

If the sequence were the same except with H as trump, there would be no Queen ask available.

11. 4C, Gerber, is NOT a substitute for 4N as keycard. It is a completely different bid which is used to ask for Aces ONLY, in NT bidding sequences ONLY, when the ONLY thing you need to know are how many Aces partner holds. Do NOT, repeat NOT, fall into the trap of thinking that you are ahead of the game by bidding 4C instead of 4N, merely because it keeps the bidding lower. If you are afraid of the 5 level you have no business asking for Aces. In suit auctions, 4C is much too valuable to be wasted on Ace asking when there are so many other uses for it. Depending on context, it may be a splinter bid showing shortness and setting partner's last bid suit as trump, a cue bid in support of the agreed trump suit or even occasionally actual club support.

Gerber is useful in NT auctions where 4N is NOT keycard.

Example: 1S-3N (balanced hand with 2 S, 13-15 HCP)-4N

4N has nothing to do with Aces. It is a quantitative slam invitation. With 15 HCP, bid 6N. With 13 HCP, pass. With 14, decide if it is a max or a min according to proper hand evaluation techniques and bid accordingly.

1S-3N-4C is then Gerber. Asking for number of A's

4D = 0 or 4 Aces

4H = 1 Ace

4S = 2 Aces

4N = 3 Aces

After a response to a Gerber 4C bid, 5C asks for number of Ks and guarantees that all 4 Aces are held.

5D = 0 or 4 Kings

5H = 1 King

5S = 2 Kings

5N = 3 Kings

12. Why is 14/30 superior to 30/14?

The difference is actually very small.

11.1 When Hs are trump there is no room to ask for the H Q after a 5D response while staying below 5 H. Since both 5H and 5S responses include information on the Q they are never an issue. If S are trump, there is no problem.

11.2 The stronger hand is likely to ask more often than the weaker hand.

11.3 For the weaker hand the 1 or 4 response is more frequent than the 0 or 3 response.

THEREFORE (*drum roll please*):

Using 14/30 you will have a SLIGHTLY better chance of finding out about the trump Q without going past 5H. The difference is not that significant. If you are more comfortable playing 30/14, don't worry about it. Just make sure that your partner is on the same wavelength.

13. NOT for the Faint of Heart

If you followed all that and are either a convention junkie or a masochist (two sets with very large overlap), let me point out that the stronger hand will respond 03 more often than 14. This leads some pairs to play 14/30 when the stronger hand asks and 30/14 when the weaker hand asks. I leave how to determine who is who as an exercise to the reader. On second thought, forget you ever read any of this. I will deny under oath that I ever exposed innocent eyes to such dangerous visions. Please burn after reading.